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RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBK #7429 3490352
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 150352Z DEC 06
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3457
INFO RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1751

UNCLAS BANGKOK 007429

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREF](#)

SUBJECT: UNHCR REGIONAL RESETTLEMENT STRATEGIC PLANNING
MEETING

¶1. Terry Rusch, PRM Refugee Admissions Director, Mike Honnold, Bangkok Regional Refugee Coordinator and Jessica Adler, Deputy Regional Refugee Coordinator participated in the December 7 - 8 Regional Resettlement Strategic Planning Meeting organized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Bangkok. Staff of eleven East and South Asian UNHCR offices attended as did government representatives from eight resettlement countries and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

¶2. This was the fourth in a series of regional strategic planning meetings and was chaired by UNHCR's Resettlement Service Director of the Division of International Protection in Geneva, Vincent Cochetel. (Previous meetings were held in Accra, Nairobi, and Beirut.) The purpose of these sessions is to review the current resettlement need from the region, identify challenges to meeting the need and share best practices.

3. The situation of the sizeable Burmese refugee population in Thailand, Malaysia and Bangladesh dominated the discussion. While the Royal Thai Government has recently agreed to allow third country resettlement processing of the 140,000 Burmese in camps along its border with Burma, significant staffing and logistical challenges persist. The remote location of some of these camps complicates selection missions for smaller resettlement countries who do not maintain a permanent field processing infrastructure and are dependent on UNHCR for support. The sizeable number of children residing in the camps while their natural parents are either still in Burma or are working elsewhere in Thailand presents special considerations when their relatives or other custodial adults are under consideration for resettlement. The need for trained child welfare staff to conduct "Best Interests of the Child Determinations" is acute. The lack of common family names and knowledge of birthdates among the refugee population presents unique challenges to documentation and raises potential fraud concerns.

¶4. The recent availability of "waivers" for the material support for terrorism provision in U.S. immigration law for the Karen and Chin was hailed as a most welcome development as considerable anxiety had developed in the camps as to what this ineligibility meant. The dire living conditions of the urban Chin refugees in Malaysia and the Rohingyas in Bangladesh argue for durable solutions to be found for these groups as well. Participants were also updated on the current political situation within and prospects for repatriation to Burma.

¶5. The group also benefited from brief presentations on the refugee situation in other countries (Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong and Indonesia) in the region.

¶6. Comment: In recent years and at the urging of resettlement countries, the profile of third country

resettlement has been raised considerably within UNHCR. The organization has made significant progress in training protection and other staff to both recognize the need for and follow through on the use of resettlement as a viable protection tool and durable solution. The U.S. has contributed considerable financial and moral support to this effort and USG participants in the Bangkok meeting were pleased to see the positive and tangible results.

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